

# You Are A Vital Link to Children...

## You can help children be healthier, now and in years to come.

As a school food service professional, you are part of a proud tradition.

Since 1946, the National School Lunch Program has provided financial support and federally purchased commodities to help schools and residential child care institutions serve nourishing, well-balanced meals to children. Many schools have also joined the School Breakfast Program to offer morning meals that help children be ready to learn.

While these programs have always been a partnership between the federal government, states, and local communities, you and your colleagues in schools have been — and still are — *the vital link* to children.

## Today, your role is even more important than ever.

Research has shown that there is a *crucial* relationship between nutrition and health, and nutrition and learning. Physicians and scientists across the country agree that what we eat — as children and as adults — can affect us in very significant ways. And, there's compelling evidence that diet-related diseases don't necessarily wait until our later years to get their start.



For example, a major factor in heart disease, a leading cause of death in this country, is fatty deposits in arteries, a condition known as arteriosclerosis. Medical studies of teenagers have indicated that these fatty deposits can begin to accumulate even in children.



Since the early days of school lunch, there have been significant changes in the way Americans eat. While the American diet may have provided adequate calories in the early 1940's, it was low in nutrients. Today, nutrient deficiencies are rare, and many of our common problems are now related to a lack of variety and balance, and to overconsumption and inadequate physical activity.

Americans typically consume more calories than they expend, which can lead to overweight and obesity. Many of us also eat more fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, and sodium than is recommended—and too few grains, vegetables, and fruits.

**You can make a difference.**

Along with other members of the education community, you can help reverse these trends by offering healthy food choices to children. In fact, you're in a special position to show children what it means to eat for good health, including how important it is to eat a variety of foods.

You and your colleagues across the country have played a huge part in our nation's battle against hunger and malnutrition. You've made a difference in the lives of millions of children. The food you provide helps them be ready to learn. The choices you offer can help them build healthy lifestyles.

**Use this menu planner from USDA to help you work toward your goal.**





### Here's what this menu planner includes:

- **For starters, you will find information on the nutrition goals established by the *School Meals Initiative for Healthy Children*.**

As a result of this initiative, there are now age-appropriate nutrition *and* calorie goals for lunches and breakfasts.

These nutrition goals for school meals are based on: the Recommended Dietary Allowances (RDA), children's calorie needs, and the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. This planner gives you background on each of these and explains why they are important.

It also explains how the nutrition goals will affect the way you plan your meals to be reimbursable under program rules — and the way your state agency will review your meals for compliance with program rules.

- **You will also find information on some alternative menu planning systems that can help you achieve the nutrition goals.**

In addition to the Traditional Food-Based Menu Planning system, USDA has established an Enhanced Food-Based system as well as two Nutrient-Based systems, called Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (NSMP) and Assisted Nutrient Standard Menu Planning (Assisted NSMP). This planner introduces these systems, explains the differences between them, and gives you an idea of how you can use each to plan a typical meal.

Using text and charts, Chapters 2 and 3 explain important features of interest to you, such as: nutrient standards; age/grade groups used; criteria for a reimbursable meal; meal structure for lunch and for breakfast; how Offer versus Serve works for lunch and for breakfast; use of standardized recipes; processed foods; production records; and child nutrition labeling.

You, or your school district, get to choose the system that's right for you, so you will want to know the basics of each system.





- **In addition, this menu planner offers practical suggestions for making simple changes to create healthy school meals.**

These include a variety of ways to modify breakfast and lunch menus to meet the Dietary Guidelines, such as serving more grains, vegetables, and fruits, and offering a greater variety of lowfat foods, including fat-free and 1-percent-fat milk.

You will also find ideas for *serving* foods — such as salsas for fresh flavor and less fat — and making substitutions, like using lowfat mayonnaise and salad dressings.

There are also tips on *preparing* foods in different ways, such as baking French fries rather than deep-frying them, or serving baked potatoes instead.

- **Despite your best efforts, kids can be hard to convince. That's why the final chapter addresses marketing healthy school meals.**

You will find strategies that have worked for some of your colleagues, such as having classroom tasting parties and planning special promotions.



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